

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
COUNTY OF KINGS

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D.B.,

Plaintiff,

COMPLAINT

-against-

DIOCESE OF BROOKLYN,

Index No. _____

Defendant.

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TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK:

Plaintiff, D.B., by and through undersigned counsel, respectfully shows to this Court and alleges as follows:

Introduction

This is a revival action brought pursuant to the New York Child Victims Act, CPLR § 214-g. The Plaintiff, when he was a minor, was sexually assaulted by Father Romano Ferraro, a Priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn and serial pedophile.

Parties, Jurisdiction and Venue

1. Plaintiff, D.B. is a citizen and resident of the State of New York.
2. Defendant, Diocese of Brooklyn (hereafter, the "Diocese" or the "Diocese of Brooklyn"), is a religious institution and organization with principal offices located at 310 Prospect Road West, Brooklyn, New York. The Diocese of Brooklyn controls all Catholic religious, pastoral and educational functions in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, encompassing approximately 180 parishes and 210 churches. The Diocese is a citizen and resident of the State of New York.

3. Father Romano Ferraro ("Father Ferraro") was at all material times a duly ordained Catholic Priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn, under the Diocese's supervision and control.

4. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction of this action pursuant to Article VI of the New York Constitution.

5. Personal jurisdiction lies over Defendant as it is present and domiciled in the State of New York.

6. Venue of this action lies in Kings County as the Defendant has its principal place of business in Kings County.

Duty

7. At all material times, the Diocese was in a special relationship with Plaintiff as one of the Catholic faithful with whom its ordained Priests would have contacts. Based on this special relationship, the Diocese owed Plaintiff a duty of reasonable care to protect him from foreseeable harm.

8. At all relevant times, the Diocese and Father Ferraro were in a special relationship of employer-employee or principal-agent, in which Father Ferraro was authorized to engage with the Catholic faithful in ministry and pastoral functions, such that the Diocese owed a duty to control Father Ferraro to prevent foreseeable harm.

9. The Diocese owed a duty to Plaintiff to use reasonable care to protect the safety, care, well-being and health of the Plaintiff while he was under the care, custody or in the presence of Father Ferraro.

10. The Diocese owed a duty to exercise reasonable care in the hiring, retention and supervision of Father Ferraro.

11. The Diocese owed a duty in transferring or assigning Father Ferraro to prevent or

avoid foreseeable harm to parishioners, the Catholic faithful and others who would have contacts with Father Ferraro.

Father Ferraro's Sexual Assaults of Plaintiff

12. Plaintiff was raised in a devout Catholic family. Father Ferraro groomed and became extraordinarily close to Plaintiff's immediate family well before Plaintiff was born. He was the family Priest.

13. Father Ferraro would offer to minister and serve as Priest in occasions in the Plaintiff's home and in the homes of his family relatives, including the homes of his grandparents and his aunt. At these functions or events, Father Ferraro would conduct mass, officiate and preside as Priest. He would perform the functions of and act in the role of Priest in his full priest garb. These occasions would include holidays, birthdays and life cycle events. On these occasions, Father Ferraro would isolate Plaintiff, either alone or with one of his brothers, and fondle Plaintiff's genitalia. Plaintiff witnessed Father Ferraro fondling his brother's genitalia. These sexual assaults occurred when Plaintiff was a young child, approximately 8 to 12 years old, in or around 1987 – 1991.

14. Such events in which Father Ferraro would officiate included Plaintiff's grandparents' and aunt's house. Plaintiff was very close with his grandparents and would often sleep over at their house. Father Ferraro would also sleep there. At night, Father Ferraro would sleep with Plaintiff on the couch downstairs while his grandparents slept upstairs. Upon information and belief, Father Ferraro sexually assaulted or abused Plaintiff on these occasions.

15. In grooming Plaintiff, Father Ferraro would give cash to Plaintiff to gain his trust and facilitate his sexual assaults.

Notice-Foreseeability**A. Father Romano Ferraro's History of Child Sexual Abuse**

16. Father Romano Ferraro entered seminary in or about 1954 and was ordained as a priest in May 1960. Prior to ordination, Father Ferraro left the seminary because he was conflicted over his sexual proclivity for boys. Diocesan officials, advised by Ferraro of this issue, convinced Ferraro to return to the seminary and continue to pursue a career in the priesthood. He was ordained as a Priest by the Diocese of Brooklyn in May 1960.

17. Father Ferraro sexually abused boys from the beginning of his tenure as a Priest. He sexually abused numerous children over decades as an active Priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn.

18. Father Ferraro was transferred between different assignments in the Diocese until being assigned to the United States Navy as a Military Chaplain in or about 1968. Upon information and belief, he was dishonorably discharged from the Navy in approximately 1970, based on an allegation of child sexual abuse.

19. Upon returning from his relatively brief stint in the U.S. Navy as a Military Chaplain, the Diocese assigned Father Ferraro to St. Rose of Lima Church in Brooklyn. He was removed from this assignment in or about May 1973, because of an allegation he had sexually abused a child. The Diocese then sent Father Ferraro to different psychiatrists to attempt treatment of his pedophilia.

20. Father Ferraro continued his prolific sexual assaults of children through the 1970's and 1980's, including in assignments outside the territory of the Diocese. For part of this time he worked as a Priest at St. Joseph's Church in Kings Park, New York, in the Diocese of Rockville Centre. He also had assignments in St. Louis, Missouri; New Jersey; and Staten Island. In approximately 1988-89, after yet another allegation of child sexual abuse, the Diocese sent Father

Ferraro to St. Luke Institute, an evaluation and treatment facility for pedophile clergy located in Maryland.

21. Upon returning from his stint at St. Luke, Father Ferraro continued to serve and act as a Priest of the Diocese, with faculties and authority to minister, provide pastoral counseling, and perform all of the functions and duties, and act in the role of, a Catholic Priest. Despite its knowledge of Father Ferraro's extensive history of child sexual abuse, the Diocese did nothing to remove this authorization from Father Ferraro such as by laicization or other means.

22. At all relevant times, officials of the Diocese knew that Father Ferraro would offer his services as an "in-home" Priest, where he would officiate and conduct mass in parishioners' homes for events or parties. At these events, Father Ferraro would seize on the opportunity to wrestle, play or otherwise interact with children attending, and would commit acts of sexual assault on these children. Upon information and belief, officials of the Diocese knew from at least one prior complaint that Father Ferraro would sexually assault children at these "in-home" events in which he would officiate as Priest, yet did nothing to control Father Ferraro or to protect or warn the unsuspecting families of the foreseeable danger to their children.

23. Father Ferraro was arrested in 2002 for the sexual abuse of a boy seven years old in Massachusetts, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison.

24. At all relevant times, the Diocese of Brooklyn knew or in the exercise of reasonable care should have known that Father Ferraro had a propensity for the conduct which caused injury to Plaintiff, in particular, that he had a propensity to engage in the sexual abuse of children.

25. At all relevant times, it was reasonably foreseeable to the Diocese of Brooklyn that Father Ferraro would commit acts of child sexual abuse or assault on children.

26. At all relevant times, the Diocese knew or should have known that Father Ferraro was unfit, dangerous, and a threat to the health, safety and welfare of the minors entrusted to his ministry, counsel, care and/or protection.

27. With such actual or constructive knowledge, the Diocese's acts and omissions provided Father Ferraro with the opportunity to commit foreseeable acts of child sexual abuse or assault on Plaintiff.

B. Diocese's Concealment of Acts of Sexual Abuse by Priests

28. The Bishop of the Diocese at all relevant times knew that Priests of the Diocese, under his supervision and control, were grooming and sexually molesting children with whom the Priests would have contact in their ministry and pastoral functions. At all relevant times, the Bishop knew that this was a widespread, ubiquitous and systemic problem in the Diocese, involving many Priests and numerous victims.

29. In February 2019, the Diocese released a list of over 100 priests of the Diocese against whom credible allegations of child sexual abuse that had been made. These priests are acknowledged to have abused children within the Diocese of Brooklyn over decades. The list includes the name of Father Ferraro.

30. Despite receiving credible allegations of child sexual abuse against priests, the Diocese acted to conceal these allegations in an effort to avoid scandal and accountability.

31. This concealment was in accordance with a policy of the Diocese, as agent, and the Holy See, as principal. In 1922, the Holy See released a confidential document to its Bishops and other officials of Catholic organizations regarding the handling of cases of solicitation of sex in the confessional. This document mandated a specific procedure for Holy See's agents, including the Bishop of the Diocese, to use when a cleric abused children using the confessional. This

document required strict secrecy. The 1922 document showed that the Holy See and its agents were fully aware that there was a systemic problem of clergy sexually molesting children using the confessional.

32. In 1962, the Holy See released the confidential document, *Instruction on The Manner of Proceeding in Cases of Solicitation* (The Vatican Press, 1962) (hereinafter referred to as "*Crimen Sollicitationis*"). The heading of the document states, "From the Supreme and Holy Congregation of the Holy Office To All Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops and Other Diocesan Ordinaries 'Even of the Oriental Rite,'" and contains specific instructions regarding the handling of child sex abuse by clergy. According to the document itself, it is an "instruction, ordering upon those to whom it pertains to keep and observe it in the minutest detail." *Crimen Sollicitationis* at paragraph 24.

33. The 1962 document reinforced that the Holy See and its agents to whom the document was directed had knowledge that there was a systemic problem of Catholic clergy sexually molesting children using the confessional.

34. At the same time, the Holy See was involved in the formation of secret facilities in the United States where sexually offending clergy would be sent for short periods of time. In 1962-63, Fr. Gerald Fitzgerald reported to the Pope on the problem of abuse of children by clergy and expressed concerns if these priests were returned to active duty.

35. Fr. Fitzgerald's reports were kept secret under the Holy See's standing policy to avoid scandal at all costs. Its recommendation was ignored, however, and instead the Holy See made a choice to return known offending priests to active duty. At this point, it is clear that the Holy See and its agents, including the Diocese, knew they had a widespread problem of clergy sexually molesting minors, and they participated in the creation and the operation of facilities in

the United States where sexually offending clergy could be sent before they were moved to another parish to work and potentially abuse again.

36. The Holy See's policy of secrecy under penalty of immediate removal from the organization (excommunication) for all involved in an accusation of child sexual abuse created a shroud of secrecy insulating Priests from consequence. Through this policy and others, the Holy See and its agents, including the Diocese, knowingly allowed, permitted and encouraged child sex abuse by the Diocese's Priests.

37. The Holy See mandates secrecy for all those involved, including agents and itself, in handling allegations of sexual abuse. Penalties for child sexual abuse include an order to move offending priests to other locations once they have been determined to be "delinquent." In response to allegations, the document mandates that supplementary penalties include: "As often as, in the prudent judgment of the Ordinary, it seems necessary for the amendment of the delinquent, for the removal of the near occasion [of soliciting in the future], or for the prevention of scandal or reparation for it, there should be added a prescription for a prohibition of remaining in a certain place." *Crimen Sollicitations* at paragraph 64. Under this policy of secrecy and transfers or reassignments, all involved are threatened with excommunication and, thus, damnation, if they do not comply.

38. The policy of secrecy and the severest of penalties for its violation were reiterated in documents issued by officials of the Holy See for the benefit of its agents, including the Bishop of the Diocese, in 1988 and 2001.

39. The policies and practices of the Diocese designed to conceal sexual abuse by clergy and protect it from scandal and liability included the following:

- (a) transfer and reassignment of clergy known or suspected to abuse minors to

deflect attention from reports or allegations of child sexual abuse;

(b) concealing from parishioners and even other clergy that a priest reassigned to their parish posed a danger of sexual abuse to children;

(c) failing to alert parishioners from the Priest's prior assignments that their children were exposed to a known or suspected child molester;

(d) failing to report sexual abuse to criminal authorities; and

(e) otherwise protecting and fostering the interests of abusive clergy to the detriment of the victims and the community, for the purpose of avoiding scandal and public scrutiny.

40. Upon information and belief, the Diocese's transfers and reassignments of Father Ferraro, including those outside the Diocese, were pursuant to this policy and practice designed to conceal sexual abuse of clergy and protect the Diocese from scandal.

41. Upon information and belief, the Diocese continued to retain Father Ferraro as a Priest, with authority to act as a Priest, without any disclosure of his heinous acts to the Catholic faithful and without any action to prevent or limit his contacts with children, pursuant to the above-described policy and in an effort to avoid scandal.

42. Indeed, the policy of secrecy and lack of consequences for the sexual abuse of children was perceived as a perquisite by clergy sex abusers. The Holy See and Diocese believed it to be perceived as a perquisite, which it condoned and used to its advantage in controlling Priests.

43. Plaintiff was in a zone of foreseeable harm as a child in close proximity with Catholic clergy.

44. The Diocese was in the best position to protect against the risk of harm as it knew of the systemic problem and foreseeable proclivities of its Priests to sexually abuse children, particularly Father Ferraro.

45. At all relevant times, while the Diocese had special and unique knowledge of the risk of child sexual abuse by its Priests, such Priests who would prey on children were outside the

reasonable contemplation of the Catholic community and families who trusted Priests to have access to their children. Plaintiff's mother in particular believed her son was safe to be around Father Ferraro as she trusted the Diocese and Father Ferraro as a Catholic Priest.

46. Plaintiff had no opportunity to protect himself against a danger that was within the knowledge of the Diocese.

47. The Diocese knew a significant percentage of Priests were using their status and position to identify, recruit, groom and sexually assault vulnerable children in the Church.

48. The Diocese knew that Father Ferraro was using his status and position to identify, recruit, groom and sexually assault vulnerable children, including Plaintiff.

C. Breach

49. During the time Plaintiff was sexually assaulted by Father Ferraro, the Diocese and the Church knew or should have known that Father Ferraro posed a foreseeable risk of sexual assault to children with whom he would have contact and opportunity.

50. With this knowledge, the Diocese and the Church breached their duties by (i) retaining Father Ferraro as a Priest with unfettered access to children; (ii) failing to adequately supervise Father Ferraro as an active Priest of the Diocese; and (iii) granting and maintaining Father Ferraro faculties or authorization to act as Priest without making any warning or notice of his perverse sexual proclivities to the Catholic faithful who would have contacts with Father Ferraro.

51. At all relevant times, the Diocese had inadequate policies and procedures to protect children from pedophile clergy.

52. The Diocese concealed its knowledge that priests were unsafe and failed to adopt policies and procedures that would protect children and reduce the risk of child sexual abuse by its Priests in general and Father Ferraro in particular.

53. The Diocese failed to warn Catholic families that their children were at risk of sexual abuse by Priests in general and Father Ferraro in particular.

54. As a direct and proximate cause of the foregoing breaches of duty, Father Ferraro sexually assaulted Plaintiff.

Nature of Conduct Alleged

55. This action alleges physical, psychological and emotional injuries suffered as a result of conduct which would constitute a sexual offense on a minor as defined in Article 130 of the New York Penal Law, including without limitation, conduct constituting rape (consisting of sexual intercourse) (N.Y. Penal Law §§ 130.25 – 130.35); criminal sexual act (consisting of oral or anal sexual conduct) (N.Y. Penal Law §§ 130.40 – 130.53), and/or sexual abuse (consisting of sexual contact) (N.Y. Penal Law §§ 130.55 – 130.77).

56. The limitation of liability set forth in CPLR Art. 16 is not applicable to the claim of personal injury alleged herein, by reason of one or more of the exemptions provided in CPLR § 1602, including without limitation, that Defendant acted with reckless disregard for the safety of others, including Plaintiff, or knowingly or intentionally, in concert with Father Ferraro, to retain Father Ferraro in ministry with unfettered access to children.

COUNT I
NEGLIGENCE
(Against Diocese)

57. Plaintiff D.B. repeats and realleges Paragraphs 1 through 56 above.

58. As a direct and proximate result of the Diocese's negligence, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer severe and permanent psychological, emotional and physical injuries, shame, humiliation and the inability to lead a normal life.

59. The Diocese's acts and conduct shows a reckless or willful disregard for the safety and well-being of D.B. and other children.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against the Diocese for compensatory

damages, punitive damages, costs and such other and further relief as this Court deems proper.

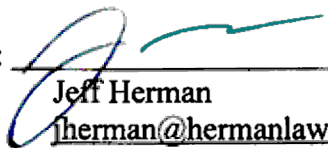
DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff demands a jury trial in this action.

Dated: New York, New York
October 31, 2019

Respectfully submitted,

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